

MULTIVERSE: LIBRARY

Chapter 9: Chapter 41-45

Chapter 41: The Greatest Dignity

"You... you bastard..."

A vein bulged on Toudou Kouichirou's forehead.

Clearly, he was beyond furious at Kaiser.

Yet, when his eyes met Kaiser's, which were devoid of any amusement, a faint trace of fear surfaced on Kouichirou's face.

He was merely an ordinary human, not a Genestella. No matter what he wanted to do to Kaiser, the reality was that he most likely wouldn't even be able to touch him. On the contrary, he might end up humiliating himself instead.

"Heh... Haha..."

Suddenly, as if realizing something, Kouichirou let out a laugh.

"You think that just because you two are teaming up for the Phoenix Festa, you actually have a chance of winning?"

He stood up, using his height to look down at Kaiser with an air of condescension.

"Don't think that just because you're ranked number one, you can defeat the other academies."

"Let me tell you now, compared to the real powerhouses from the other academies, you two are nothing."

"In a competition against them, you don't stand a chance!"

Faced with Kouichirou's declaration, Kirin Toudou was rendered speechless.

Even Kaiser did not immediately refute his words.

Because he knew—Kouichirou wasn't wrong.

While he and Kirin were respectively the former and current Rank One of Seidoukan Academy, standing at the very top of their school, when placed against the true elites from other academies, they weren't considered all that strong.

Take, for example, Jie Long Seventh Institute's Rank One. As someone familiar with the original story, Kaiser knew that this person was a genuine monster. Not just within the six academies, but across the entire world, they were among the absolute strongest. Compared to that, Kaiser and Kirin, as students, weren't even in the same league.

Le Wolfe Black Institute's Rank One was another beast entirely. They had already secured back-to-back championships in the Lindwurm Festa, and many believed that their third victory was all but guaranteed. If they succeeded, they would achieve an unprecedented three-time championship streak, securing their name in history.

Additionally, Saint Gallardworth Academy's Rank One was an unparalleled swordsman, regarded as the greatest swordsman of the current generation in Asterisk. Queenvale Academy for Girls' Rank One had claimed second place in the previous Lindwurm Festa, and many saw them as the second strongest student in this era.

Compared to them, Kirin was undoubtedly outmatched. Even Kaiser wasn't entirely confident in facing such foes.

Even if he pushed Ser-Veresta to its absolute limit, he was only confident in going up against Saint Gallardworth Academy's and Queenvale Academy's Rank One. However, when it came to Jie Long Seventh Institute and Le Wolfe Black Institute's Rank Ones, Kaiser had no certainty of victory at all.

It was clear that, compared to the Rank Ones of other academies, Kaiser and Kirin still had room to grow.

There was no helping it—Seidoukan Academy's overall performance in recent Festas had made this evident. In terms of overall strength, Seidoukan was weaker than the other academies. Otherwise, they wouldn't have ranked dead last in the overall standings.

Competing against those powerhouses was undoubtedly dangerous for Kaiser and Kirin, given their current strength.

However—

"You think I haven't studied this year's Phoenix Festa?"

In response to Kouichirou's mockery, Kaiser's voice remained calm, steady as a still lake.

"As far as I know, Le Wolfe Black Institute's Rank One is only participating in the Lindwurm Festa. He won't even be in the Phoenix Festa. Similarly, Saint Gallardworth Academy places a strong emphasis on the Gryps Festa, so their higher-ranked students rarely participate in the Phoenix Festa either."

"Jie Long Seventh Institute's Rank One hasn't even reached the eligible age for participation. While their academy did have a team that placed second in the previous Phoenix Festa, those students have since shifted their focus to the Gryps Festa."

"Queenvale Academy for Girls' Rank One also has their sights set solely on the Lindwurm Festa. They won't be in this year's Phoenix Festa either."

"Even Allekant Academy's reigning Phoenix Festa champions have already graduated this year."

"In other words, this year's Phoenix Festa won't feature any overwhelming monsters. The strongest competitors will likely be the remaining Page One students from each academy."

Although winning a Festa granted a wish from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, the top talents of the six academies wouldn't enter carelessly.

After all, per the regulations governing all Asterisk students, each student was only allowed to participate in a Festa three times in total.

Regardless of whether they won or lost, a person could only compete in three Festas throughout their academic career. Once they exceeded that limit, they would no longer be eligible to participate.

With such constraints, students with real potential had to carefully choose which Festa to compete in—opting for the tournament that best suited their strengths.

If someone specialized in solo combat, they would focus exclusively on the Lindwurm Festa.

If someone excelled in team battles, they would dedicate themselves to the Gryps Festa.

For instance, the reigning two-time Lindwurm Festa champion from Le Wolfe Black Institute had already competed twice. With only one more chance left, there was no way she would waste it on anything other than securing a historic three-time victory.

Similarly, Saint Gallardworth Academy heavily emphasized teamwork, making the Gryps Festa their strongest competition. They had even claimed first place in last year's overall Festa rankings, so it was only natural that they prioritized the Gryps Festa above all else.

Queenvale Academy for Girls had historically struggled in the Festas—except for their current Rank One, who had secured second place in the previous Lindwurm Festa. This year, they were once again aiming for that tournament, leaving behind only a few lower-ranked students for the other competitions.

Jie Long Seventh Institute and Allekant Academy were unique cases. Their top students didn't have a strong preference for any particular Festa, but due to graduation and shifting priorities, their strongest contenders either moved on or chose different tournaments.

In conclusion—

"This year, in the Phoenix Festa, we might be the only Rank Ones present."

Kaiser's voice remained indifferent.

"A team formed by Seidoukan Academy's current and former Rank One—against opponents without a single other academy's Rank One. If we don't take this chance to compete, then we may as well forget about ever entering the Gryps Festa or Lindwurm Festa."

"This Phoenix Festa is, in fact, our best opportunity to win a championship."

"So your claim that we have no chance at victory is completely unfounded."

If that weren't the case, then why had the audience erupted into such excitement when Kirin had accepted his invitation on stage?

Was it not because they, too, believed that Kaiser and Kirin had the greatest chance of winning?

If Seidoukan could produce a Phoenix Festa champion in the first year, their overall standing in this season's tournaments wouldn't look nearly as embarrassing.

This was something that Claudia Enfield, as Student Council President, had stated herself.

"This..."

Kouichirou instinctively took a step back.

"Get lost."

Kaiser no longer bothered with even a pretense of civility. His voice was ice-cold.

"At the end of the day, the moment Kirin lost to me and was no longer Rank One, your entire plan was already a failure. Continuing to vent your frustration here only makes you look even more pathetic."

"Leaving now is the greatest dignity you have left."

Kouichirou's expression stiffened, his entire body trembling.

For a long moment, he seemed unwilling to accept reality.

But eventually, as if resigning himself to fate, his entire demeanor slumped in defeat.

Without another word, he turned unsteadily and walked away.

"Uncle..."

Watching him leave, Kirin's eyes glistened, her expression tinged with sorrow.

No matter what, he was still her uncle—her father's brother, her own blood relative.

Seeing him like this, the kind-hearted girl couldn't help but feel pain in her heart.

But—she had made her decision.

Kaiser's words had solidified her resolve.

"The Phoenix Festa..."

This was the closest stage to her wish.

She had to win.

She would win.

And she would save her father.

No matter what.

Chapter 42: Let's Do Our Best, Kirin

Seidoukan Academy, Central Courtyard.

It was the afternoon, and though the academy was sweltering under the heat, the central courtyard, surrounded by lush green trees, was pleasantly cool and refreshing—a welcome respite from the summer sun.

Kaiser and Kirin Toudou walked side by side along the stone path winding through the courtyard. At a glance, they looked like an amicable pair of siblings, the atmosphere between them relatively harmonious.

Of course, if one were to only observe Kirin, they might get the impression that she was feeling uneasy.

Though she walked alongside Kaiser, her demeanor was hesitant and bashful, as if she were extremely nervous. Every so often, she would steal a glance at the young man's face, only to immediately turn bright red, her emotions written all over her expression in an obvious display.

Kaiser, on the other hand, acted as though he hadn't noticed, leading the girl onward at a steady pace.

His destination was a secluded corner of the courtyard—one of his favorite spots as of late.

It was a relatively isolated area, sparsely populated, with a small pavilion providing shade. Kaiser had come here often.

Whether for morning runs or sword practice, he would always end up here. Not only was it free from crowds, but it was also peaceful and quiet—an ideal place for training.

Familiar with the route, Kaiser effortlessly led Kirin to the pavilion.

"Come, have a seat."

He took a seat on one of the stone benches and patted the space beside him, motioning for Kirin to sit.

"O-Okay!"

Kirin, still visibly tense, hurriedly sat down next to him. However, her posture was stiff—her back ramrod straight, unintentionally emphasizing the fullness of her chest.

"....."

Kaiser inadvertently caught sight of this and immediately regretted inviting her to sit beside him.

They were too close... How was he supposed to keep himself from looking?!

"Senpai?"

As if sensing something off, Kirin turned to Kaiser, a look of curiosity flashing across her face.

She had noticed that the usually composed young man had suddenly become restless as well.

"...Ahem!"

Kaiser cleared his throat, feigning composure. Forcing a natural smile, he turned to Kirin and spoke.

"This may be a little late, but I'd still like to say it."

"Thank you for accepting my invitation, Kirin."

Hearing this, Kirin quickly shook her head, waving her hands in a flustered manner.

"N-No, there's no need to say that, Senpai!" she replied hastily. "I should be the one thanking you! Thank you for inviting me and choosing me as your partner!"

As she spoke, she suddenly hesitated. Then, as if making up her mind, she stood up and bowed deeply to Kaiser.

To Kirin, Kaiser's actions were nothing short of a salvation.

She had always told herself that as long as she followed her uncle's instructions, she would eventually be able to save her father. But who knew how long that would take?

According to Toudou Kouichirou, in order to achieve their goal, Kirin not only had to become Rank One—she had to establish an unprecedented legacy, leaving behind an unparalleled record.

Just thinking about the sheer amount of time, effort, and stress required to reach such an unreachable standard was suffocating.

Kirin had spent so long trapped in uncertainty, not knowing how far she needed to go, or how much she needed to sacrifice, in order to fulfill her wish.

But now, with Kaiser's invitation, she had finally caught a glimpse of the future—a tangible path to her goal.

How could she not be grateful?

"I-I'll do my best not to hold you back, Senpai!"

She awkwardly tried to express her gratitude through determination, her voice stumbling slightly.

"You don't need to worry about that at all."

Kaiser chuckled at her reaction.

"If I didn't believe in you, I wouldn't have invited you in the first place."

After all, the reason Kaiser had chosen Kirin as his partner...

Was because she was strong.

Seidoukan's Rank One.

Her swordsmanship surpassed even the protagonist of the original story, and she had once even defeated him.

Among all the potential partners available, Kirin Toudou was undoubtedly one of the best choices.

Thus, the moment Kaiser decided to enter the Phoenix Festa, he had immediately set his sights on her.

"If we're entering the Phoenix Festa, we have to win."

Only by doing so would this experience be truly exhilarating—truly fulfilling.

"Yes!" Kirin immediately responded with a determined nod. But then, her expression shifted slightly as she hesitantly asked, "Then... what should we do next, Senpai?"

Kaiser had given her confidence back in the waiting room, making her believe that this Phoenix Festa was the best opportunity to fulfill her wish.

But just because they had the highest chance of winning didn't mean victory would come easily.

"The lack of overwhelming monsters in this year's Phoenix Festa doesn't mean it'll be an easy tournament. With a wish at stake, every academy's top talents will still flock to compete."

Kaiser thought back to the events in the original story and began explaining.

"As we discussed earlier, the Rank Ones of each academy likely won't participate. However, we still need to be wary of the Page One-ranked students from every school."

"In particular, those ranked near the top. The top three students of Le Wolfe Black Institute and Jie Long Seventh Institute, for example, all possess the ability to contend for Rank One at Seidoukan."

"The same goes for Saint Gallardworth Academy and Allekant Academy. Saint Gallardworth has many skilled swordsmen who might team up for this year's Phoenix Festa, while Allekant is known for producing unexpected dark

horses. Last year's Phoenix Festa champions came from there, after all, so we can expect another strong contender from them."

If things unfolded the same way as the original story, the strongest opponents they would face would likely come from Le Wolfe Black Institute and Allekant Academy.

Saint Gallardworth Academy and Jie Long Seventh Institute posed less of a threat—their most troublesome fighters wouldn't be participating this time around.

As for Queenvale Academy for Girls...

Well... they'd probably just send some cute girls to act adorable.

If they ran into them, there wasn't much to say—just knock them down and make them sit in place crying for a while.

And then...

"While the competitors from other academies will be troublesome, our biggest obstacle will definitely be them."

Kaiser's tone became slightly more serious, making Kirin tense up.

"Them'...?"

She cautiously asked.

Then, she received an unexpected answer.

"Ayato Amagiri and Julis-Alexia von Riessfeld."

Kirin's eyes widened in shock.

"Amagiri-senpai and Riessfeld-senpai?"

She was dumbfounded.

"That's right."

Kaiser met her gaze and gave a faint smile.

"Unless something unexpected happens, they'll be our greatest hurdle in claiming the championship. Without a doubt."

After all, they were the actual winners of the Phoenix Festa in the original story—the true protagonists.

"In order to prepare for our strongest opponents, we'll need to start training tomorrow. At the very least, we have to build enough synergy between us."

"The Phoenix Festa begins in a month. The time we have isn't exactly plentiful, but it's not too urgent either. As long as we give it our all, the championship will be ours!"

"O-Okay!"

Kirin's heart burned with determination, her confidence soaring.

She hesitated for a moment, then took a deep breath.

And with newfound courage, she looked up at Kaiser and spoke.

"I'll do my best... Kaise-senpai!"

Kaiser froze for a second.

Then, he let out a chuckle.

"Let's do our best together, Kirin."

At his words, Kirin beamed brightly.

Her smile was absolutely adorable.

Chapter 43: Out of Curiosity, or Malice

Just as Kaiser and Kirin Toudou officially formed their partnership and devoted themselves to focused training, as expected, news of their

participation in the Phoenix Festa spread across the internet at an astonishing speed.

And the first to receive this information, naturally, were the other academies competing against Seidoukan Academy.

More specifically, the student council presidents of each academy—those who held the highest authority among students.

"—Hmph, that sword again?"

In a dimly lit room, a man clad in a black student uniform, bearing a school badge with a dual-sword emblem on his chest, let out a cold snort.

He was stocky, short in stature, and his appearance could only be described as unremarkable. However, his eyes carried an intimidating sharpness, and his perpetually tense, angry expression made him seem as though he was always on the verge of exploding.

Before him, a floating screen projected a video.

The footage displayed the full recording of Kaiser's duel against Kirin Toudou.

The man glared at the screen, his gaze locked onto the image of Kaiser wielding Ser-Veresta.

When he saw the moment Kaiser's body glowed like starlight, unleashing the sword's heat, wrapping himself in waves of scorching wind, his already intense gaze sharpened—growing heavier, colder.

He opened another floating screen beside him, which displayed a detailed dossier on Kaiser.

The level of detail in this intelligence report was astonishing—easily rivaling the one Toudou Kouichirou had provided to Kirin.

"...He's only had that sword for just over a month, yet he's already able to wield its power to such an extent?"

The man muttered coldly to himself.

After a brief pause, he reached for a communication device.

This was a special contact tool—one that only the student council president was permitted to use.

"Perhaps I'm being overly cautious, but to avoid repeating past mistakes, I need to act now."

His gaze flickered as he dialed a number.

"Release her. Have her register for the Phoenix Festa."

His voice, devoid of warmth, echoed through the dark room.

"Tell her... her mission this time is to utterly destroy someone."

"Seidoukan Academy's current Rank One—Kaiser."

"Break him for me."

....

A Grand, Ancient Palace

This space was completely out of place amidst the modernized cityscape.

It was a world of pavilions and towers, bridges over flowing water—a breathtaking, traditional scene reminiscent of a grand imperial palace.

At the deepest part of this space, a small girl, wearing a golden dragon-emblazoned school badge on her chest, sat upon a throne-like chair, watching a video with great interest.

The footage on her screen was also the full recording of Kaiser's duel with Kirin Toudou.

"Hmm hmm~ Not bad at all."

When the video ended, the girl clapped her hands happily.

"A bit raw, but the style is already maturing. Tremendous potential, truly tremendous."

"Such promising talent—both of them."

"If I were the one training them, I wonder how long it would take for them to catch up to Xiaohui?"

Despite her childlike appearance—seemingly no older than ten—her words carried the wisdom of someone far beyond her years, creating a jarring sense of dissonance.

"What a pity, what a pity... Why are all the best talents never from Jie Long?"

"If only they were from my school, I could take them under my wing immediately."

"Especially this one..."

Her gaze ultimately settled on Kaiser.

Watching his radiant figure amidst the waves of heat, her young yet strangely ancient face took on a deeply enigmatic expression.

"A technique I've never seen before... A combat style I never imagined... There's no sign of rigorous tempering, yet his movements feel utterly natural, as if they were ingrained in his very being."

"Rather than an unpolished gem being refined, it's more like an uncut stone continuously growing stronger on its own."

"Under that ever-thickening outer shell, I wonder... what exactly is hidden inside?"

"Strange. So very strange."

Despite her words, her expression grew increasingly delighted.

"Interesting. This is what makes this city so interesting."

"Even though he's not my creation, what a fascinating development... I wonder just how far this boy will go?"

"Grow quickly, little one."

"I look forward to the greatest thrill you can bring me!"

As she spoke, her smile contorted.

Like a beast ready to devour its prey.

....

Asterisk, The Redevelopment Zone

As its name implied, this area had yet to be officially incorporated into Asterisk's urban map.

If there was a word to describe this place, it would be slum.

This district was home not only to those who had been expelled or had failed to make it in the academies but also to Genestella criminals who had fled to Asterisk seeking refuge.

Over time, it had become a true slum—a place of poverty and lawlessness, rife with crime and danger.

This was the dark side of Asterisk.

The area was even home to gangs. Illegal businesses thrived here, and it was crawling with delinquents and organized criminals. Anyone who wandered in carelessly would be lucky to leave unscathed.

And yet, in one corner of this lawless zone, a young girl sat quietly.

Dressed in simple, unassuming clothing, a beret perched atop her head, her long, chestnut-brown hair cascaded down her back, veiling her frail and delicate frame.

She sat atop a broken wall fragment, one small hand resting against the jagged edge of the structure while her other hand moved lightly—fingers tapping as if playing an invisible piano.

Graceful. Effortless. As she browsed through the floating screen before her.

"Kaiser... is it?"

She murmured the name as she watched the footage of the young man swinging Ser-Veresta, shattering Kirin Toudou's school badge.

A soft, melodious chuckle escaped her lips.

"He really is strong."

Recalling an incident from a certain café frequented by her academy's students, she let out another light laugh.

"Another Four-Colored Magic Sword user... Just like that one from Saint Gallardworth Academy. He's only had Ser-Veresta for such a short time, yet he's already wielding it with such skill. Good thing I kept an eye on him."

At first, she hadn't paid much attention to the boy.

An Orga Lux user? She had seen plenty of those before. Even if he had the potential to become a high-ranking fighter, his level was not something she normally needed to concern herself with.

The turning point had been that day in the café.

Perhaps the boy himself hadn't noticed—but at that moment, she had been listening to their conversation.

She had also been watching.

And she had seen it.

She had seen his Activator—a pitch-black device he refused to let anyone else touch.

Even more than that—because of her unique abilities, she had sensed something faint, something barely perceptible.

The will of the sword.

A will akin to dissatisfaction. A will akin to blind loyalty.

It was then that she realized—this boy was not just a wielder of an Orga Lux.

He was recognized by it.

He was the true king of the magic sword.

After digging into his background, using her own channels and resources, she had discovered something even more shocking.

His compatibility with Ser-Veresta exceeded the known limit.

That was when she truly became curious.

And since then, she had been watching him closely.

"I wonder... Will he enter the Lindwurm Festa?"

She mused softly to herself.

"If we meet in the Lindwurm Festa... it'll be fun."

Waving a hand, she closed the screen and lightly hopped down from the ruins.

"I look forward to seeing you again, Kaiser."

She sang the words like a melody as she turned and walked away.

Behind her, countless delinquents and gang members lay sprawled across the ground, motionless for an unsettlingly long time...

Chapter 44: A Month of Training

Seidoukan Academy, Comprehensive Arena.

In addition to the designated dueling stages, the Comprehensive Arena housed numerous training rooms and practice grounds.

These facilities weren't freely available to just anyone. Students had to meet certain conditions to apply for their use, making them some of the academy's more valuable resources.

However, within the Comprehensive Arena, there were twelve training rooms that no student could apply for—no matter how much they wanted to use them.

These twelve rooms were reserved exclusively for the Page One.

Among the many privileges granted to the twelve highest-ranked students of Seidoukan Academy, one of the most significant was the right to their own private training facilities.

The quality and scale of these training rooms were allocated based on ranking—the higher the rank, the better the facility assigned to them.

In other words, the training room assigned to the Rank One student was the finest of them all.

Its ceiling was extraordinarily high, and the space itself was vast—large enough to house an entire sports stadium. Even if one were to go all out in battle, there was no risk of causing excessive damage to the surroundings.

At this moment, within this top-ranked private training room, two figures were locked in an intense duel.

"Clang!"

The sharp clash of steel rang through the room as Ser-Veresta's pristine white blade met the cold glint of a real sword—Senbakiri.

A burst of sparks exploded outward from the impact.

"Haah!"

Kirin Toudou, clad in a red sports uniform tailored for female students, let out a sharp cry as she twisted her slender wrist. The legendary blade, Senbakiri, carved through the air, unleashing a flurry of strikes as swift as lightning, streaking toward her opponent.

"Clang—! Clang—! Clang—! Clang—! Clang—!"

The sound of metal clashing against metal echoed repeatedly, each impact scattering dazzling sparks throughout the training room.

Kaiser, wearing a blue sports uniform, remained calm in the face of Kirin's relentless onslaught. Without moving a step, his arm alone guided Ser-Veresta, deflecting every incoming strike with astonishing precision.

Despite its immense heat, the magic sword's white-hot blade met Senbakiri time and time again—without ever cutting through it.

To an outsider, this sight would have been shocking.

The infamous Ser-Veresta, said to be unblockable, capable of burning through anything, was merely repelling Kirin's blade without cutting it.

It completely contradicted the sword's exaggerated reputation.

However, neither Kaiser nor Kirin seemed surprised by this. They had already grown accustomed to this scene, their battle continuing undeterred.

"Swish!" "Swish!" "Swish!"

Kirin's strikes grew ever sharper and swifter, increasing in speed with every passing second. Like an unending storm, her blade wove a seamless web of slashes, filling the space between her and Kaiser.

Her movements were graceful—like a butterfly dancing around Kaiser, her sword arcing through the air in precise, lethal trajectories.

She attacked from every angle, every direction, every possible pathway.

A blinding storm of steel.

Kaiser, meanwhile, continued deflecting her attacks, but each time he parried a blow, it was as if he were compressing a coiled spring—forcing Kirin's strikes to accelerate even further.

Her swordsmanship reached new heights.

Each time her blade was knocked aside, she instinctively twisted her wrist and adjusted her posture, seamlessly accelerating her next strike.

This was the essence of Toudou-ryuu's Renzuru—a relentless, endless chain of sword strikes.

Compared to her performance in the previous Ranking Battle, Kirin was undeniably stronger now.

But—

Kaiser had not remained stagnant either.

"—Now, it's my turn."

Suddenly, as if delivering a final judgment, Kaiser moved.

"Vmm—!"

The magic sword's white-hot blade vibrated intensely—shifting from defense to offense in an instant.

With an explosive motion, Ser-Veresta met Senbakiri in a direct clash.

"Clang!"

A violent shockwave burst from the impact, generating a surge of heat as Kirin was blasted backward.

"Ugh...!"

Her hands went numb from the force. She was sent flying through the air, barely managing to stabilize herself before skidding to a stop.

But Kaiser had already vanished.

By the time she steadied her stance, he was upon her.

Kirin instinctively raised her sword, preparing to counter his assault.

Yet—

Mid-sprint, Kaiser suddenly threw Ser-Veresta forward.

"What—?!"

Kirin's eyes widened in shock.

"Boom!"

Completely unprepared for the move, she failed to react in time.

The magic sword, thrown like a javelin, slammed directly into her.

Although Ser-Veresta's tip failed to pierce her, the force of impact sent her crashing into the training room's reinforced walls.

"Vmm—!"

Before she could even catch her breath, the floating Ser-Veresta hovered in front of her, its tip aimed directly at her forehead.

"_____"

Kirin's eyes widened.

She didn't dare move.

A few moments passed. Then, as if accepting defeat, she sighed and lowered Senbakiri.

"You alright?"

Kaiser approached, reaching out to grab Ser-Veresta's hilt. The magic sword instantly returned to its inactive state.

A warm smile crossed his face.

"I-I'm fine."

Kirin checked herself—aside from some minor soreness, she was unscathed.

Kaiser had exercised perfect control. Even without her Prana Barrier, she wouldn't have suffered a single scratch.

"I lost to you again, Senpai..."

She murmured in mild frustration.

"You're too rigid in your approach," Kaiser replied casually. "Renzuru is incredibly powerful, but its strength lies in its ceaseless offense. It's heavily attack-oriented, but noticeably lacks defensive measures. If someone exploits that flaw, your openings become obvious."

Kaiser deactivated Ser-Veresta, returning it to its Activator form.

Seeing Kirin's slightly dejected expression, he reached out and patted her shoulder.

"Besides, you weren't prepared for the fact that Ser-Veresta can move on its own."

He chuckled.

"That's why you lost so quickly."

His words made Kirin feel a little better.

But what surprised her more was her growing admiration.

"I've been training with you for almost a month now, and yet you still find ways to surprise me."

She sighed in awe.

"The way you use Ser-Veresta... It's like the sword is an extension of your own will. Even though it's a blade said to be able to burn through anything, you're controlling it so precisely that it doesn't even damage my sword."

"That's not too difficult," Kaiser shrugged.

"The reason Ser-Veresta is considered unblockable is because of the immense heat concentrated in its blade."

"If I reduce that heat and lower the output, then its destructive properties won't activate."

In order to properly spar with Kirin, Kaiser had been intentionally suppressing the sword's heat output during their duels. That way, Senbakiri wouldn't instantly be incinerated upon contact.

Otherwise, they wouldn't even be able to train together.

"Senpai... your progress is unbelievable."

Kirin muttered.

"A month ago, I could still pressure you with swordsmanship alone. But now, even without using Ser-Veresta's power, you could probably beat me with technique alone."

To this, Kaiser simply offered a single response.

"Depends on the situation."

Chapter 45: The Opening Arrives as Scheduled

It had been nearly three months since Kaiser had obtained the Ultimate Authority Over Weapons.

During this time, he had steadily increased his strength while repeatedly testing and confirming the specific characteristics of his ability.

Take Kirin Toudou's comments about his swordsmanship, for example.

Since Kaiser's skill with the sword was derived entirely from his authority, his proficiency was directly tied to the strength of the weapon he wielded.

His ability granted him complete mastery over a weapon's power and allowed him to wield it as though it were second nature.

However, it did not bestow upon him the techniques or profound understanding required to draw out a weapon's strength in a conventional manner.

For instance, if he were given a wooden sword, he would never be able to cut through steel.

Regardless of how perfectly he utilized the weapon, a piece of wood simply did not have the material properties to surpass metal.

A true master swordsman, on the other hand, could potentially use a wooden sword to cleave through steel using sheer technique and mastery.

Conversely, if an ancient holy sword of legend were handed to an ordinary swordsman, that person would never be able to fully unleash its power right away.

The sword's strength would vastly surpass the wielder's skill level, meaning they would only be able to bring out a fraction of its potential.

But if Kaiser were given that same sword...

As long as his body could withstand it, he would be able to fully unleash its power, instantly stepping into a realm beyond that swordsman's capabilities.

That was the fundamental difference between Kaiser and others.

If he wished to wield divine-level swordsmanship, then he would need to wield a divine-level weapon.

So, in reality, Kirin had been slightly mistaken in her assessment.

The reason Kaiser could best her with pure swordsmanship wasn't because of his own innate skill—it was because he wielded Ser-Veresta, an Orga Lux.

As a magic sword, Ser-Veresta could withstand the full output of his authority, allowing him to unleash a level of swordsmanship beyond normal limits.

If he were using an ordinary Lux, he would never have been able to reach this level, let alone defeat Kirin with technique alone.

Of course, that only applied to swordsmanship.

Over the past month, Kaiser had also requested Claudia Enfield to provide him with a fresh supply of Manadyte.

Through absorbing these resources, his power had grown significantly once more.

His physical abilities and Prana reserves had now completely surpassed Kirin's.

At this point, it was entirely possible that he could defeat her even with an ordinary Lux.

Unfortunately—

"At this point, normal Manadyte has completely lost its effectiveness for me. It provides no further growth."

As Kaiser discussed training insights with Kirin, this thought occupied his mind.

"To progress any further, I'll need to absorb Urm-Manadyte instead."

Regular Manadyte had too low a purity level. Its Mana concentration was insufficient to offer any benefit to his current self, no matter how much of it he absorbed.

Urm-Manadyte, however, was entirely different.

"With its extremely high purity and vastly superior energy concentration, absorbing Urm-Manadyte should allow me to continue growing stronger."

But that was far easier said than done.

Unlike ordinary Manadyte, Urm-Manadyte was a precious and highly restricted resource.

Almost all of it was controlled by the Integrated Enterprise Foundation.

It was nearly impossible for outsiders to obtain it through conventional means.

Even within the IEF, strict regulations were in place.

For example, Allekant Academy, true to its name as a research institution, housed numerous students with exceptional scientific prowess. If any of them produced significant research results, they could submit formal applications for Urm-Manadyte as an experimental material.

Kaiser wasn't sure if Seidoukan Academy had a similar system.

But even if it did, he had no way of acquiring Urm-Manadyte through scientific research.

"Claudia probably wouldn't be able to help me either—or if she could, it would come at a steep price."

He thought to himself.

"Good thing the Phoenix Festa is about to start."

If he could win the tournament, he could make a request to the Integrated Enterprise Foundation and have them provide him with as much Urm-Manadyte as he needed.

"Looks like my reasons for competing in the Phoenix Festa just increased again."

As Kaiser pondered this, Kirin suddenly spoke up.

"Come to think of it, the academy's about to go on break, isn't it?"

Her words pulled Kaiser from his thoughts.

"Yeah," he nodded. "Summer vacation is coming up. Our homeroom teacher even mentioned it in class yesterday."

That's right—Kaiser was still attending class.

Though at this point, he was starting to get bored.

He had already learned everything he needed to.

His curiosity about this world's history and events had been satisfied.

At this point, continuing to attend school was just routine.

He had even been considering skipping classes entirely to focus on training.

But—

"Since break is starting soon, does that mean our training is coming to an end, Senpai?"

Kirin lowered her voice slightly.

"Yeah," Kaiser nodded, fully understanding what she meant.

"The time has finally come."

The Phoenix Festa was scheduled to take place during the summer break.

More specifically—

Next week, on the very first day of vacation, the tournament would officially begin.

"Claudia sent me a message yesterday," Kaiser said, pulling up a floating screen.

"She wants us to stop by the Student Council Office today. I'm guessing it's to discuss the Phoenix Festa."

He flicked his fingers, sending the message over to Kirin.

"So now...?"

Kirin looked at him expectantly.

"Yeah," Kaiser smiled. "Let's head over now."

'''

Seidoukan Academy – Student Council Office

The office was located on the top floor of the High School Division's main building.

As Kaiser and Kirin stepped inside, chatting casually, they quickly noticed that they weren't the only ones who had been summoned.

"Huh? Amagiri-senpai? And Riessfeld-senpai?"

Kirin's voice carried a trace of surprise.

Standing before Claudia's desk were a young man and a young woman, both engaged in conversation with her.

They turned around at the sound of their names.

It was Ayato Amagiri and Julis-Alexia von Riessfeld.

"You're here," Ayato greeted them with his usual lazy smile. "Kaiser, Kirin."

"Judging by the looks of you two, you just finished training, didn't you?"

Julis crossed her arms, scrutinizing them as if she were trying to gauge their progress.

"So? How's your training coming along?"

Her tone was challenging.

As if to say—

"If your training wasn't up to par, then we'll be the ones taking the championship."

Kaiser wasn't about to play along.

"You tell me," he retorted smoothly.

"You look pretty confident yourself. I take it your training went well?"

Julis and Ayato exchanged glances.

Then—

They both smiled.

Clearly, they had also been training seriously.

Their teamwork had improved considerably.

"If we meet on the battlefield, don't expect us to go easy on you."

Ayato grinned.

Julis smirked.

Kaiser simply shrugged.

"Of course. Let's all go all out."

Kirin nodded in agreement.

Their synchronization was so seamless that it was on par with Ayato and Julis.

"Hehe."

From her seat, Claudia had been watching the entire exchange.

Seeing this, she let out a small laugh.

"Watching the four of you now, I feel even more confident about Seidoukan's chances of winning."

These two teams weren't the only representatives of Seidoukan Academy in the Phoenix Festa.

But among all the competing teams—

These two were, without question, the strongest contenders for the championship.

That was why Claudia had gathered them here.

"The tournament starts next week," she continued.

"The organizers have already finalized the grouping list. I've received an early copy—let's take a look."

With that, she extended her hand, opening a floating screen.